Fulani MS11

M
566 may leave his master whenever he pleases, either to devote himself
M F to trade or to enter the service of another man; but often he gets all
his work from his master.

563 The Peul shepherds never were slaves of the Mossi, because they
M F only knew how to watch the herds and were incapable of working the
[FBD 189] land. They were, nevertheless, held in severe vassalage by the Mossi,
especially by the nabas, and served as victims in certain sacrifices.
Some Mossi sold by the Yarsé or by other Mossi have occasionally been
their slaves, especially in the Dori region called Gyémaré by the
natives.

/15/ Chapter 2. Administration

M
157 The power of the chiefs and the submission of their subjects are
characteristic traits of Mossi country. The spirit of submission
permeates the whole Mossi mentality. The Mossi are not particularly
secretive or incommunicative, as the Bambara are said to be. On
the contrary, they talk quite freely to their friends, even of their
personal affairs; this does not mean that they are unable to keep a
secret, especially if it is the king's secret. Two individuals have to
be equals if there is to be some freedom between them; this freedom
may develop into a certain closeness, but never into friendship in the
highest sense of the term. If the Mossi appears secretive, it is because
he is afraid to offend someone more powerful than himself. He al-
ways yields before a chief, before someone who "has the strength,"
as he puts it, while inwardly he may retain his own opinion and act
as he pleases. When a chief talks, he hears nothing but these words
M in reply: bé néré, naba — "That's it, that's right. I agree with you."
576 The Mossi salute, formerly used in all the Black empires of the
Sudan, especially in the courts of Ghana, Mali, and Gao, provides
good evidence of this mentality. When we first enter the country as
foreigners, we are shocked to see a man thus lower himself before
another man. In order to salute, the Mossi puts down his load, hat,
and sword, removes his shoes, sits on the ground, folds his legs slightly,
and leans the upper part of his body forward. The elbows rest against
the ground, as far apart as possible; the forearms, folded in front of

77/ 157 It would seem that living as they do in the midst of spirits who permeate the air, the earth, the fire, the houses, the fields, and everything else, and who are not always in an accommodating mood, the Mossi would live in a perpetual state of terror since they have everything to fear from the poisoners during the day, the seuya during the night, but this is not the case. The Mossi are a light-hearted people; they like to laugh, and they do not look a bit worried. Once, as I pointed this out to an old man, he replied: "Everyone does not have enemies. And then, why worry about the inevitable?" In fact, those dreadful sorcerers are only to be feared by those who know that they have an enemy and that he can resort to the power of the sorcerers. The spirits are pacified with sacrifices, and if a soul is seized at night by a seuya, the only thing to do is to try one's best to release it.

Furthermore, like so many others, the Mossi easily forget all these beliefs in the course of everyday life and act as if they were masters of their own actions and confident of achieving their goals. Laughingly and playfully they toss sticks and stones at the wind eddies that whirl by, stirring up the dust and dry leaves. And yet, how many spirits and sorcerers may they conceal, each more dreadful than the next! The most ardent believers consult sorcerers and offer sacrifices before every undertaking; the others only bother with sacrifices on the Day of the Dead and when misfortune strikes. Is it not suffering that recalls us to the religious life, because it reminds us of our dependence on a power greater than ours? Here as elsewhere, there are ardent and lukewarm believers; no one seems to be indifferent, and atheism is unknown. They are not yet sufficiently civilized for such ideas!

600 Their conversion to Catholicism seems to be only a matter of time. Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci. /The harvest is great, but the workers are few./ May the Master of the Harvest dispatch many workers to this land and hasten the day when the whole of this people will enter the divine fold!

/108/ CONCLUSION

181 By way of conclusion, we shall now attempt to draw in rough outline the mental characteristics of the Mossi as we see them.

181 /109/ The Mossi have passions, and they are the same as ours:
152 ambition, jealousy, gluttony, sloth, lust, and sometimes even avarice, though more rarely. All of these reign among them. Because they cannot control their emotions, cannot resist their evil inclinations, these passions become tyrannical as they grow older. The children are usually quite malleable. The spirit of obedience and complete submission to their parents is instilled into them from such an early age that when taken sufficiently young their character can be trained and they become capable of truly virtuous actions which cost them an effort. When left to themselves, however, they listen only to their own desires and seek out whatever can bring them some satisfaction. This is rather similar to the morality of a slave who fears only the whip.

The Mossi are vain and easily offended by a word they have misunderstood, even when spoken in jest. The practice of humility is far from being one of their habitual pursuits. The Mossi are quarrelsome and testy, especially when they have drunk a little more millet beer than they should have. There are no festivities and few markets of any importance where a quarrel does not arise among some natives, often for no better reason than because someone is jostled in the crowd. The brawl begins with insults, proceeds with clubs, and ends up with knives. No one gives way. A Mossi who gave way in a quarrel would feel dishonored. The man who gives in proves that he is the weakest, and at the first opportunity someone who witnessed the incident will insult him in turn. Why not, since he does not defend himself? This is why a Mossi who has been abused will give in only at the final extremity, especially if his father and mother were insulted, and all cursing soon gets to this point. When drawn apart, the opponents keep up their invectives at a distance. An angry Mossi loses all control. A quarrel often has its aftermath. The Mossi are spiteful, and, especially if they were placed in the weaker position, they will seek revenge in one way or another, so it cannot be said that they got the worst of it.

181 Not only do the Mossi have passions like ours, but like us they also
157 have their temperaments. There are the lymphatic ones, languid and incapable of any effort; there are the nervous people who are always in motion, sensitive to a fault, who weep at the slightest remark; there are the taciturn ones who almost never laugh, who think that no one loves them and that everyone wants to hurt them, who like solitude and

181 who speak little; there are the choleric people, more liable than others
157 to anger, more spiteful, but also endowed with more energy.

Energy is not the chief quality of these people, who are trained by
181 their leaders to blind and faithful obedience. The tight organization
156 we have described has its unhappy consequences, atrophy of the will and destruction of the spirit of initiative. Such is the price. A Mossi cannot resist those who are more powerful. Flexible and almost cowardly before his superiors, he makes up for it with his inferiors and shows great arrogance and disdain toward those who are weaker.

181 /110/ The Mossi do not exercise their will, and they do not exer-
153 cise their thinking faculty. This is not because they lack intelligence, but because they are not accustomed to thought except when their interests are at stake, at which time some of them demonstrate true intelligence and diplomacy.

The Mossi do not question the why of things. While small children in our country like to argue and often perplex us with their questions, the Mossi never ask themselves, "How can this be? Why is it so and not otherwise?" The first answer that comes to mind satisfies them.

This lack of thought is the cause of their lagging civilization, for is it not true that we move forward unceasingly only because we seek to investigate the cause of everything? It also results in a paucity of ideas. Conversations turn mainly upon women, food, and agriculture during the rainy season. Their sphere of ideas is quite restricted, but it is capable of expansion, for the Mossi may be considered quite intelligent.

539 If proverbs express the wisdom of a people, the Mossi certainly do not lack wisdom and often couch it with great subtlety. Permit us to prove this by quoting a few proverbs, culled in the course of conversations by Fr. Thueux, who kindly conveyed them to us and who gathered explanations, since some of them are real enigmas to our European minds.

1. Kota ningri, ka kot' sen kong'ye.
   Give above you, not below.
   (If you give to someone who is more powerful, you will always get something out of it.)
2. Maokasankaré ñarda kon lo'é naobi taoré.
   No matter how much it may hurry, the heel never catches up with the toes.
   (Who is the hen to sing before the rooster?)

5: Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1959
FA28 Mossi FA28

debt-free cultivation entitle the settler to permanent residence on the land he has been loaned.

Adaptation to the conditions of the new geographical setting in which the Mossi find themselves has been relatively rapid and easy. The Yatenga and the Niger project lie within the same climatic zone; the only important ecological difference between the two areas is the increased water supply resulting from irrigation. This change in the origin of the water supply, control of which provides a basic sanction of Mossi religion, was less disturbing to traditional belief than might have been anticipated.

Rather than diminishing their belief in their own religion, it only convinces the Mossi colonists that the forces of the natural order are different in their new habitat and accordingly must be controlled in a different way. Finding the indigenous inhabitants of the French Sudan, the Bambara, to be zealous Moslems, the Mossi settlers have accepted Islam as the religion of their new country. Confident that their religious obligations in the Yatenga will be taken care of by the elders who have remained behind, and with some pressure from those who have already become Moslemized, new arrivals rapidly embrace Islam as the system by which the supernatural forces governing their new environment can be manipulated.

Their acceptance of Islam has been as superficial as it has been rapid. There is time neither for the study of Moslem theology nor for the soul-searching which must precede the rejection of previously held religious beliefs. With a tradition which emphasizes the observance of religious form rather than intense emotional participation in ceremonial, their observance of the five daily prayers, taking of a Moslem name, deference to the marabout, and casual attention to certain dietary prohibitions should be viewed as their rational reaction to the fact of being in a strange land with an obviously different supernatural order which must be dealt with in a new way. Desire for a measure of control over this new supernatural order, pressure for conformity to the religious norms of their new social setting, and—perhaps most significantly—the permissiveness which characterizes the West African's acceptance of the existence of new supernatural forces, makes Islamization possible without the rejection of previously held religious ideas or practices.

In contrast to the relative ease of their adaptation to the natural and supernatural aspects of their new environment, their adjustment to the social situations which result from the change in economic organization has been most difficult. They must, of course, learn a new technology: the cultivation of rice and cotton by modern methods. Since the machines used for clearing the land and for the harvest are operated by

10:Hammond E-5 (1954-1956) 1964 FA28 Mossi FA28
Yatenga

tradition of hostility. Such groups obviously have both equal and mutually independent status.

The Processes of Mossi Joking

I have already suggested that the significance of joking as an adjustive mechanism is derived from the manner in which it provides concurrently for the operation of three interrelated but analytically separable processes. These are *communication*, *control*, and *catharsis*.

As a means of communication, joking provides a permissive and flexible context in which a grievance can be expressed, thus allowing for its rectification and the restoration of amity. As a means of control, the public nature of most joking serves to shame the object of the jocular offensive, to invoke social pressure for his conformity, and to elicit support for the complainant. As a means of catharsis, the joking expression of aggressive feelings reduces frustration and thus serves indirectly to perpetuate the amicable aspect of the relationship in which it occurs.

Joking also gives pleasure. The feeling of triumphant release that follows the successful—and safe—expression of hostile sentiments probably functions to reinforce reliance on joking as an adjustive mechanism. And the intrinsic pleasure of wit may also explain the persistence of joking behavior in the absence of an immediate "structural need" for it.

A more detailed description of one of the relationships already mentioned—sibling-in-law joking—will serve to illustrate these several points. Because of its relation to the pivotal institution of marriage, sibling-in-law joking is perhaps the most frequently used adjustive mechanism in Mossi social structure. The potential for marital conflict is high. This appears to be due to the combined factors of a sexually differentiated enculturative experience that results in marked dissimilarities in adult male and female personality; to an age difference between husbands and wives of at least ten years; to the classic stresses of polygyny; to the subordinate status of Mossi women, particularly of junior wives within their husband's patriclan; and to the possible dissatisfaction of a woman's parents, particularly her mother, at the loss of their daughter's services or at the inadequacy of bride-wealth payments.

Whatever its origins in a specific instance, it is important that this potential for conflict be controlled, for each marriage extends the network of affinal and cognatic ties that link the patrilineage to the larger community. Given a persistent potential for strife, the preservation of marital stability requires the provision of a means for minimizing its deleterious effects. When conflict occurs, the resultant frustration must be reduced, and accord must be reestablished in a manner that does no serious damage either to the marriage itself or to the larger context of social relations in which it is embedded. Sibling-in-law joking helps to accomplish this.

If, for example, a Mossi is irritated by his wife's performance of some aspect of her duties in the household or the field, he need not address her directly in order to communicate his dissatisfaction and release the tension he feels. To do so in a culture which places a high value on indirection in emo-